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ABSTRACT

This study examined how campus peer culture influences the ways in which multiracial students make meaning of their racial identity, and applies Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of cognitive development to analyze elements in the college environment that stimulate or inhibit identity development. Discussion of the situation of multiracial students in the context of student development and identity development theory is followed by explanation of the model used in this study, which involves microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, and macrosystems. The study focused on perceptions of 24 students at three undergraduate-focused institutions and had four main components: individual interviews with participants; written responses by participants; a focus group of three or four students per campus; and analysis of and archival data about each campus concerning multiracial issues. Data were organized according to Bronfenbrenner's ecology model. A major theme that emerged was the meaning and importance that students attached to finding a space to fit in on campus. Results are interpreted in terms of the kinds of spaces, or microsystems, students occupied on campus and how these microsystems interacted to create the mesosystem of peer culture and the ecology of multiracial identity development. (Contains 39 references.) (DB)

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SPACE TO GROW: CREATING AN ECOLOGY MODEL OF BI- AND MULTIRACIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT IN COLLEGE STUDENTS

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Introduction

Multiracial students are thought to comprise one to two percent of the college population and their numbers are growing (Schmidt, 1997), but their experience is not reflected in either the student development literature or the literature on multiracial identity development. College offers a variety of settings in which students explore identity: peer cultures, academic work, campus activities, etc. (Astin, 1984; Chickering & Reiser, 1993; Roark, 1989), but it has not been known whether or how the college environment facilitates or inhibits the identity development of young people whose parents are of different federally-defined races[1]. Current theories of multiracial identity development take a postmodern perspective on race as a social construction (Chandler, 1997; Root, 1996), and some students are well-versed in both postmodern and identity development theory (Renn, 1997). These students live, though, on campuses that are highly modernist in structure and outlook (Bloland, 1995; Tierney, 1993), where peer culture regulates group membership and status.

Prior to the October 1997 change in the Census guidelines, studies showed that less than two percent of the population claimed to belong to more than one of the government's existing racial categories (Schmidt, 1997). While this number is not very large compared to the general population, a change in how these individuals indicated their racial group categorization on the census could have a significant influence on racial group statistics used to enforce various civil-rights laws (Baron, 1998; White, 1997). In the current battle over access, equity, and affirmative action policy in higher education, racial statistics matter. At present there is no accurate count of multiracial students and no systems in place to deal with the new check-as-many-as-apply option.

This study does not attempt to develop such a system, but it begins to explore how the campus environment shapes multiracial identity. College students live within but slightly separated from the larger society, and therefore are influenced by both national social movements and campus-based peer cultures and activities. While raising larger questions about the use of racial categories in higher education, this study focuses on how campus peer culture influences the ways in which multiracial students make meaning of their racial identity in college. Bronfenbrenner's (1993) ecology model of cognitive development becomes a framework to organize various elements in the college environment that work together to stimulate or inhibit identity development.

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[1] According to the Office of Management and Budget Directive 15 (1997), the federal government defines five racial categories as: American Indian or Alaska Native; Asian; Black or African American; Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander; White. In addition, the government recognizes one ethnicity: Hispanic or Latino. Participants in this study were multiracial (parents from more than one federal racial designation, such as white and asian) rather than multiethnic (parents from more than one ethnicity, such as Korean-Japanese).

The result is an ecology model of multiracial identity development that may apply beyond higher education to describe identity development in other settings.

In this paper, I will set the study in the context of student development and identity development theory. I will discuss the methods used to gather and analyze data, then I will present the findings as they relate to the creation of an ecology model of student development. Finally, I will discuss implications, limitations, and areas for future research.

Multiracial college students in context

As postmodernism increasingly influences curricula and campus culture, the notion of identity development in college becomes more complicated. Indeed, Tierney (1993) has written that a postmodern society will not even have a unitary, consensual definition of identity or identity formation. Kenneth Gergen proposed that "as belief in essential selves erodes, awareness expands of the ways in which personal identity can be created and re-created in relationships" (1991, p. 146). His scheme of development traced an individual from a modern self-conception of essential individual identity through a series of changes in self-perspective, ending with the postmodern "relational self ... in which it is relationship that constructs the self" (p. 147). Tierney put the issue in an organizational light as well, arguing that identity is not fixed, that it depends on time and context, and that individuals are "constantly redescribed by institutional and ideological mechanisms of power" (p. 63).

When we challenge traditional definitions of the self as something that can be discovered and identified, rather than continually constructed in relationships, existing theories of student development are inadequate to describe what is happening while young people are at college. Chickering & Reiser's (1993) assertion that identity formation precedes the development of mature interpersonal relationships makes little sense if identity formation occurs through engagement in those very relationships, as Gergen (1991) and Tierney (1993) believed. Astin's (1984) and Roark's (1989) theories of involvement and challenge/support hold true in a postmodern view of student development, but require a shift in emphasis from the individuals operating in a college environment to their relationships within that setting. The field of student development is in need of an overarching theory that takes into account the construction of various aspects of identity in the college context. Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1993) created such a unifying theory for the field of cognitive development, and his ecology model formed a basis for organizing data from this study in light of both traditional and postmodern theories of racial identity development.

There are a number of theories about how an individual achieves such a positive racial identity, most of them focusing on how people of color accomplish this developmental task (e.g. Cross, 1995; Atkinson, Morten & Sue, 1979). An exception is Helms (1990, 1995), who has proposed models for both blacks and whites. Virtually all of the theories are based on a

psychosocial or social interactionist paradigm in which an individual comes to understand him- or herself through a series of racialized encounters with family, friends, and others. These models follow a general format of increasing sophistication from a stage of no awareness of race or racial difference to a stage of integration of race as an aspect of a complete adult identity. According to most stage theories of minority identity development, an individual moves from "pre-encounter" (Cross, 1995; Helms, 1990, 1995) to "internalization-commitment" (Cross) or "integrative awareness (Helms, 1995) through a process of rejecting majority (white) culture and embracing minority culture. Kich (1992), King & DaCosta (1996), Poston (1990), Root (1992), Williams (1996), and others have found that while the psychosocial assumption holds up when translating monoracial models to multiracial situations, the traditional stage models pose problems in exploring healthy biracial identity formation.

There is general agreement that development of racial self-identity occurs within the context of social encounters. In an update of her 1990 theory, Helms (1995) posited that development occurs as needed by an individual to cope effectively with "personally meaningful racial material in her or his environments" (p. 186). Cross (1995) revised his 1978 theory of Nigrescence to accommodate the notion that it describes the resocializing experience in which a black person is transformed from a non-Afrocentric pre-existing identity into one that is Afrocentric. Similarly, Atkinson, Morten & Sue (1979) outline how a lifetime of social encounters propels individuals from one stage to the next.

The racial identity models do not necessarily address the needs of mixed race students, who cannot engage entirely in an immersion in one of their component cultures without putting aside, at least for that time, other aspects of their heritage (Kich, 1992; Poston, 1990; Kerwin-Ponterotto, 1995). Furthermore, even when these students do choose to affiliate with monoracial student cultures, they are often rejected if they express their multiraciality (Daniel, 1992; Renn, 1997; Yemma, 1997). The communities of like-others that support the development of many students of color are not generally available to assist multiracial students in exploring their racial identities (Renn, 1997; Williams, Nakashima, Kich & Daniel, 1996). Accordingly, models of multiracial identity formation generally do not include a stage of immersion in a monoracial minority culture.

Early models of biracial identity development (Kich, 1992; Poston, 1990) were stage-based and modernist in orientation, but more recent theories take a postmodern approach. Multiraciality is seen as a state of "positive alterity" (Weisman, 1996) or "positive marginality" (Daniel, 1996) in which the goal of multiracial identity formation is an individual's ability to engage in a variety of "border crossings" (Giroux, 1992) between and among social contexts defined by race and ethnicity (Root, 1990, 1996). Maria Root (1996) proposed a theory of identity formation that does not depend on an orderly progression through developmental stages, but rather relies on an individual's ability to be comfortable with self-definition in, across, and/or in between categories.

The notion of racial borderlands or border zones (Anzaldua, 1987; Giroux, 1992; Root, 1990, 1996; Zack 1995) sets the stage for the dissolution of race as an impermeable, essential category. In all of these models, social interactions are seen as critical elements in the construction of multiracial identity, but theorists do not generally offer a synthesized model for understanding how different interactive settings work together to influence identity development.

An ecology model for understanding identity development

Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1993) presented a useful model for understanding the influence of multiple person-environment interactions such as those that are thought to influence racial identity development. Attempting to put forth a unifying theory of cognitive development he created a theoretical framework that incorporated the work of many other psychologists including Kurt Lewin, Lev Vygotsky, and Gordon Allport. Bronfenbrenner united their theories into an ecological paradigm that he said captures the context-specific person-environment interaction that "emerges as the most likely to exert influence on the course and content of subsequent psychological developments in all spheres, including cognitive growth" (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, p. 10).

Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1993) rejected the common assumption of most research that developmental attributes (intelligence, achievement, Piagetian-type stages and processes, etc.) can be measured and examined out of the context of an individual's life. Instead, he presented his paradigm as one in which an individual interacts within ever-more-complex spheres of relationships, each of which is integral to development. Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1993) ecological model entails microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, and macrosystems. These "systems" describe the nested networks of interactions that create an individual's ecology (see Figure 1 on following page). This ecology changes over time for a given individual, and for the purposes of this paper, I will discuss Bronfenbrenner's model in terms of traditional-age college students in a residential college setting.

Briefly, a microsystem is a specific interaction that occurs between the developing person and one or more others. A college student might have a microsystem involving a roommate, an athletic team, a science lab section, or a student club. A mesosystem consists of interactions between and among two or more microsystems. Peer culture on campus comprises such a mesosystem. An exosystem comprises an environment which has an impact on the developing individual but does not contain him or her. The college administration represents such a system. Finally, the macrosystem is the totality of an individual's micro-, meso-, and exosystems, and entails the entire realm of developmental possibilities for him or her. Macrosystems are temporally and culturally specific to that individual and are dynamic rather than static. The macrosystem places the person in the context of his or her developmental ecology.

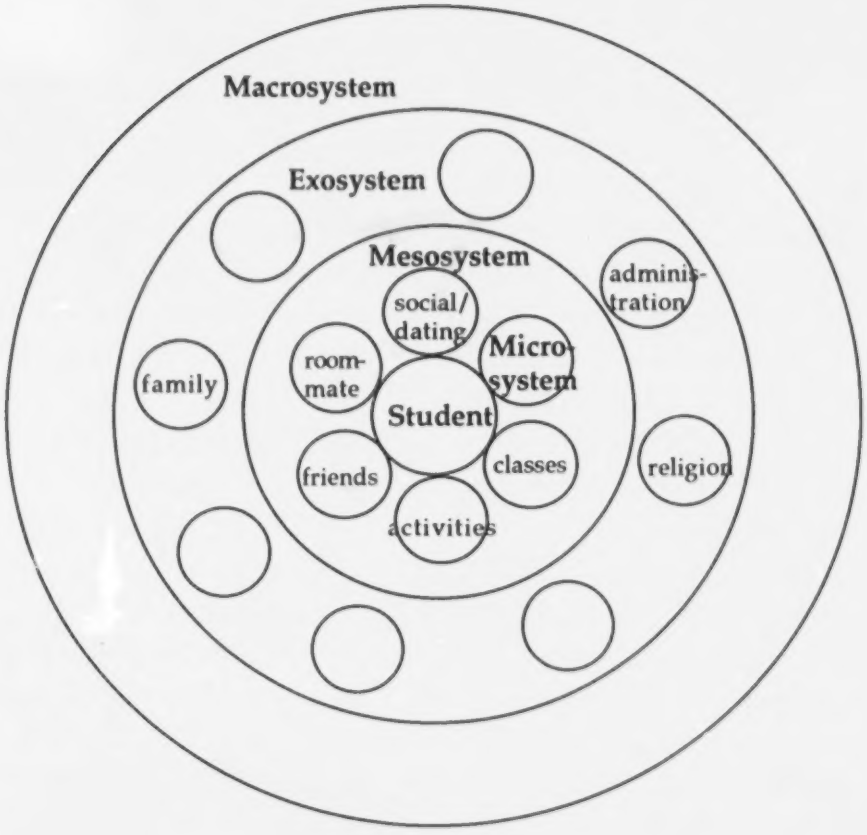

Figure 1. Ecology of cognitive development.

The complex interactions within and between microsystems can inhibit or enhance development in many areas, including racial identity. The possibility of developing a multiracial identity in college is provided–or not provided–by the macrosystem of modern culture, but then an individual must also have micro-, meso- and exosystems that provide opportunities for that identity to develop. Students at residential colleges interact with a number of microsystems that challenge and support their growth, but it is the overarching macrosystem that encompasses all of the developmentally instigative properties of an individual student's experience. Though Bronfenbrenner did not address racial identity formation directly, his ecology model translates from cognitive development to identity development; the racialized microsystem encounters and macrosystem properties of an individual's experience can promote, enhance, or inhibit his or her racial identity development.

Research on multiracial people supports the application of Bronfenbrenner's (1993) ecology model to racial identity development. Williams (1996) described the process by which "What are you?" questions cause biracial individuals to examine their raciality and to refine their answers. Root (1990) told how biracial people come to understand their "otherness" through their frequent explanations of themselves and their families. Poston (1990) cited peer pressure on adolescents as a source of developmental energy, and Kich (1992) cited the importance of interactions with peers, family and community in experiences of recognition, acceptance, and belonging. Clancy (1995) criticized Kich's theory for relying too strongly on the micro level of the family where individuals have significant power to name their own identity and not enough on larger social systems like education where individuals have less power to do so. In either the psychosocial or Clancy's sociopolitical view, the social environment clearly affects the construction of racial self-identity. Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1993) model can take all of these theories into account when attempting to create a unifying theory of the construction of multiracial identity.

Research methods

There were 24 participants in this study, eight from each of three undergraduate-focused institutions: Carberry, an Ivy League university; Ignacio, a Catholic university; and Woolley, a liberal arts college (all names are pseudonyms). All institutions were coeducational and drew applicants from a national pool, though students from the New England states and New York were over-represented on each campus. Woolley was entirely residential and Carberry and Ignacio were primarily residential. These institutions resembled one another in several campus characteristics (coeducational, undergraduate focus, residential, geographic region, tuition, range of test scores) while differing in size, selectivity, and racial diversity.

Table 1. Institutional summaries (all data are for 1997-1998)

School	No. of under-grads	US cit. students of color	Int'l stud.	Tuition	Middle 50% SAT	Admit rate	First-year retention/ graduation
Carberry	5500	27%	6%	$23,124	1280-1480	19%	96%, 93%
Ignacio	9000	16%	3%	$20,292	1180-1360	41%	94%, 88%
Woolley	1400	12%	3%	$20,820	1070-1250	75%	84%, 72%

Of the 24 participants, four had two parents of color and twenty had one white parent and one parent of color. There were four first-years, eight sophomores, four juniors, and eight seniors. Fifteen women and nine men participated, divided evenly among the institutions. I recruited

participants through flyers, email lists, targeted mailings (at Woolley), and snowball sampling. For more information about participants, see participant summary table on page 8.

There were four main components to this study: individual interviews with all participants, written responses by participants, a focus group of 3-4 students per campus, and observations of/archival data about each campus vis-à-vis multiracial issues. Interviews provided an opportunity for individual students to respond in depth to questions about their college experiences and how they made sense of their multiraciality in the college setting. Written responses gave students a chance to reflect more deeply, in their own time and fashion, on how they made meaning of identity development. The focus groups accomplished several goals. They gave me an opportunity to watch how multiracial students interacted when asked to discuss their identity development; they provided students an opportunity to interact with their multiracial peers; and they served as member checks. The archival research and observations provided background information about each campus milieu, particularly as it pertained to multiracial issues. The data for this study therefore consisted of audio tapes, transcripts, and field notes from the interviews and focus groups, the students' written responses, archival information and field notes from campus observations, and information gathered during member checks.

The interpretive framework for this study included the constant comparative method (Bogdan & Biklin, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and the generation of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Strauss & Corbin (1994) consider grounded theory methodology appropriate for generating theory from data or for elaborating and modifying existing data, which was the purpose of this study. Furthermore, because grounded theory relies on the researcher's interpretation of data but also includes the perspectives and voices of the participants (Strauss & Corbin, 1994), it is a compelling methodology for a study that explores participants' meaning-making.

I began data analysis with line-by-line coding of transcripts of individual interviews. Based on the pilot, I had anticipated that codes relating to academic work, peer culture, involvement in activities, and identity development would emerge. In addition, I developed codes relating to family, international experience, race, culture, and personal development. I was concerned about how my identity as a monoracial white person might influence my data coding and analysis. I therefore enlisted a biracial colleague and a multiracial Carberry student to code two transcripts each. They independently agreed with the major codes, and each also made suggestions for modifying the subcodes slightly.

To assist in constant comparative analysis, I used HyperResearch to code line by line and to build codes and themes throughout the course of data collection. I also relied on Miles & Huberman's (1994) description of cross-case displays to organize and manage my data. I performed inductive analysis of data from interviews, responses, and field notes as the study

progressed, and this analysis formed the basis for the summaries presented in the focus groups/member checks. When the data from the focus groups/member checks was added to the total, I completed coding and analysis using HyperResearch.

Table 2. Participant summary

Name[2]	College	Year	Self-description; father / mother[3]
Alexandra	Ignacio	junior	multiracial; hispanic & Chinese/native am.
Audrey	Woolley	sophomore	multiracial; Scottish, English/Irish, African, Chinese
BJ (female)	Ignacio	first-year	multiracial; african-american/Filipino (plus white stepfather)
Dan	Carberry	sophomore	biracial asian american or biracial Chinese-American; Italian/Chinese (raised with white stepmother)
Dave	Woolley	senior	multiracial; Iranian/white American
David	Carberry	senior	biracial or hapa yonsei[4]; third gen. French-Irish/third generation Japanese-American
Dee Dee	Carberry	senior	black; african american/South Asian
Elektra	Ignacio	senior	half asian or half; white/Chinese
Elizabeth	Woolley	first-year	biracial; Japanese-American/white
Erika	Woolley	first-year	half American, half Japanese, or international; Japanese/American
Fred	Ignacio	senior	half-Japanese; English, Irish, Scottish/ 2nd gen. Japanese-American
Jazz (female)	Woolley	sophomore	multicultural; Egyptian or Nubian/white
Jeff	Carberry	junior	hapa, biracial, or multiracial; 2nd gen. Japanese-American/European-American (French, German, Spanish)
Jennifer	Ignacio	senior	half white, half Filipino; Filipino/white
Julia	Carberry	sophomore	biracial; white/black
Kayla	Carberry	junior	mixed race, mixed, or multiracial; Hungarian Jew/Hindu Indian
Kira	Carberry	sophomore	biracial; white/Filipina
Marisa	Woolley	senior	Jamaican, multiracial, or black; Indian/Afro-Caribbean & white
Mike	Woolley	sophomore	black; black/Puerto Rican
Phil	Ignacio	first-year	mixed, biracial, or half asian; German, Austrian, Hungarian/Chinese
Sapo	Woolley	sophomore	Mexican-American; Mexican/Irish
Sina	Carberry	junior	biracial; white/Samoan, of Chinese descent
Summer	Ignacio	senior	half asian; Latvian Jewish/Korean
Vincent	Ignacio	sophomore	multiple heritage or international; Swiss/Chinese

[2]All names are pseudonyms selected by participants.

[3]Self-descriptors and descriptions of parents' heritage are those used by students in interviews, written responses, and focus groups.

[4]"hapa" is the Hawai'ian word for "half," often used as shorthand to mean mixed race asian americans; "yonsei" is the Japanese word indicating fourth-generation Japanese-American

Findings

I organized my data according to Bronfenbrenner's (1993) ecology model of cognitive development, which allowed me to represent the psychosocial nature of racial identity development in a nested series of interactive settings (see Figure 1). As individuals operated in the microsystems of friendship groups, academic work, and activities, they built around them the mesosystem of peer culture. Together with the influence of systems in which students were not directly involved (e.g. the college administration), peer culture shaped the developmental landscape for multiracial students, influencing how they thought about race, culture, identity, and community.

A major theme that emerged from the data was the meaning and importance that students attached to finding a space to fit in on campus. Multiracial students were looking for space to belong on campuses not designed to accommodate people who do not fit into previously defined categories. In this paper, I will concentrate here on the kinds of spaces, or microsystems, these students occupied on campus and how those microsystems interacted to create the mesosystem of peer culture and ecology of multiracial identity development. For a detailed discussion of the meaning, construction, and importance of the notion of space, see Renn, 1998a and 1998b.

Across the three campuses, space was both a public and a private notion. Students talked about the public spaces that were created through participation in organized activities, residential life, and classroom interactions. Private spaces were created as individuals sorted through the messages of peer culture, family background, and personally-held notions of culture, race, and self. This public-private dichotomy reflected the literature on biracial identity development (Root, 1990) and formed a dialectic in which identity was questioned and shaped.

The key elements in the maintenance of public space were shared culture, physical appearance, and participation in legitimizing activities. Biracial students often felt excluded from groups of monoracial students of color, either because they lacked cultural knowledge or because they did not share physical characteristics common to a certain racial group. Border maintenance was performed both from within groups, as monoracial students expressed their views on who "really belonged" there, and from outside them, as multiracial students questioned their own cultural legitimacy. Identity-based spaces were important to students as they sought opportunities to fit in with peers and to feel as though they belonged at an institution. Student development and racial identity development theorists also emphasize the centrality of identity-based spaces as opportunities to explore and "try on" different identities.

The spaces (microsystems) participants occupied

While finding space to belong was important, it was the specific person-environment interactions that happened in and among those spaces–those microsystems–that contributed to racial identity development. Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1993) model was his attempt to create an overarching model for cognitive development. I found that his theory of micro-, meso-, exo-, and

macrosystems fit my data as well and explain overall patterns of identity development for participants. Students were embedded in microsystems in academic work, involvement in activities, friendship groups, and social/dating situations. These microsystems connected in various ways to form the mesosystem of peer culture experienced by individual students causing them to change their ideas about race and culture, as well as their ideas about their own identity. Family background, life before college, and international experience before or during college also emerged as important elements in identity development, though I will concentrate in this paper on the elements of the peer culture mesosystem.

Students' ideas about race and culture, and therefore their ideas about the possibilities for their identities as multiracial people, were an outcome of the developmental instigators in their environements. The systems in some students' lives provided opportunities for extensive exploration of culture, race, and identity prior to college. Other students had fewer opportunities before college but were exposed to a range of developmental challenges on campus. In the following sections I will present data to support the ecology model of identity development, showing how microsystems combine to form a mesosystem of peer culture and how that peer culture interacts with exosystems and macrosystems to influence students' ideas about race, culture, and identity.

In general the participants' microsystems fit into the four main categories I will discuss in this section: academic work, friendship groups, social and dating life, and involvement in campus activities. Issues related to residence life and roommates are generally contained in the section on friendship groups.

Academic work

The microsystems of academic work in college contributed to multiracial students' identity development by contributing to their knowledge about the cultures of their heritage, by providing a forum for students to write and speak about their experiences, and by helping students develop cognitive skills and models to understand the construction of race and identity. A microsystem might entail an individual classroom, a laboratory, or a study group related to a course or in preparation for a graduate/professional school exam. Faculty played a role in some students' development, and academic work formed the microsystems for most of those interactions, though participants spoke little of relationships with faculty, even when asked directly. While academic work had a positive impact on students' identity development, identity also contributed to academic success; several students were motivated by issues related to their identity to undertake challenging courses or projects.

Some students felt as though they arrived at college with a cultural knowledge deficit, and the opportunity to engage in academic work about one of their heritages was an exciting option. Some students based their entire major on their interest in issues related to identity. For example,

Elektra was completing her International Studies major at Ignacio and had chosen to concentrate on European and Asian economics. Sapo was an Hispanic Studies major, and David and Sina were concentrating in East Asian studies. Alexandra was drawn to the social sciences, especially cultural psychology, because she liked courses that "analyze just the way people relate to each other and why they do what they do." While she was not exploring a particular aspect of her identity, she enjoyed placing identity into the larger context of identity and inter-group relations. Her asian, latino, and native american background gave her a sense of grounding in that work.

Lack of knowledge of a language was often cited as a reason for feeling excluded from monoracial groups on campus, and language courses were one way to acquire this cultural knowledge. Some students took courses to learn an unfamiliar language of a parent. At Carberry, Kayla signed up for a group independent study project to learn Tagalog, the language of the Philippines. She was concerned that her father (who was white) would be upset and feared telling him she had enrolled in the course. Her main concern was that he would feel excluded from the family if she and her mother spoke to one another in Tagalog, a language he did not understand. She said, "I try to avoid practicing my Tagalog [with my mother and sister] when he's around, because I don't want him to feel left out."

Other students enrolled in language or literature courses to continue to study a language spoken at home. Vincent continued to study French, the language spoken in his Swiss-Chinese household, and Phil kept up his study of Chinese as he had in high school. Sapo took Spanish literature classes as part of his Hispanic Studies major. These courses provided outlets for students to maintain their cultural knowledge while they were immersed in a predominantly white, English-speaking student body.

In addition to language classes, students explored their cultural backgrounds through anthropology, sociology, history, and literature courses. Students at Carberry and Ignacio also had the opportunity to take courses that focused on multiraciality itself. Jeff described a literature course called "Jungle Fever: Reading Interracial Relationships." Carberry students could also take a course called "Growing Up Multiracial in the United States." Summer took a friend's suggestion to take a psychology course at Ignacio on the experience of multiraciality. Woolley students were not aware of any such courses on their campus, but expressed interest in taking them if they were offered.

Whether or not they took courses focused specifically on their heritage or on multiraciality, students on each campus described times when they chose one of these topics for a paper or project in another course. Kayla decided to investigate racial attitudes at Carberry for a social psychology project, and Sina researched the history of the United States Census and how racial categories were established and changed over time. Marisa used her experiences as a Jamaican immigrant and

multiracial woman in her creative writing major at Woolley. At Ignacio, Jennifer wrote an essay on being biracial titled "What's for dessert?" In her interview, she said:

> I just played around with the idea of the check box and never knowing what to check. And then always some of the names that people will associate with people of multiracial origins. I had friends who would jokingly call me all kind of things- only good friends, never in an offensive way- like "Oreo Cookie," "Milkshake," all that kind of stuff.
>
> I played around with different meanings of those words, and what they meant to me, and if I should ever have taken offense to them. How at Ignacio I've never felt comfortable in joining any of the asian clubs, though they send me things all the time. I remember I went to a meeting once and when I walked in, and I felt really uncomfortable, like people were looking at me like, "Are you sure you should be here?"

An important function of academic work was to help students acquire cognitive means to deal with issues of identity, identity development, and identity politics. In this area, the Carberry cohort stood out. They were by far the most articulate about how theory impacted their thinking about race, identity, and community. They discussed courses where "deconstructing multiraciality" was a topic and some had learned theories of identity development in psychology courses. Their ability to reflect on their own identity and identity development was enhanced by their access to language and theory. Some of them also noted that theory was fine in the classroom or lecture hall, but out in the "Real World" it was less useful. Kayla said:

> Naomi Zack was our [Multiracial Heritage Week] Convocation speaker my freshman year. And she's a philosopher, and she was basically saying, OK, race isn't real, so do something about it. Change your world view, but we're like, maybe some anthropologists accept this, intellectuals accept this, but it's not like you can go to the community at large on this. ... (laughs) So, I think we have to deal with the fact that socially race is real, and it affects our social interactions. And even if race isn't real, culture is real, and upbringing is real, and environment is real, so. I don't know. I go back and forth on this a lot.

Though Carberry students were most facile with theory, students at all schools used academic courses as a venue for making comparisons between different cultures and for understanding culture as different from race. Alexandra studied cultures through her social science courses, all Ignacio students took at least one course to fulfill a "Cultural Diversity" requirement, and students at Woolley took compulsory first-year seminars that focused on issues of cultural diversity. Audrey said:

> I think a lot of things that people consider race are more cultural differences than race differences. And I think they have a problem drawing the line between that. ... I think culture for me includes how you were brought up, by parents and by the society, culture includes your religious beliefs, includes your traditions, what you do in your country, and that doesn't necessarily include race.

A final influence the microsystem of academic work had on participants was in exposing them to the attitudes of their fellow students. Through meeting new people in courses, participants both made friends and learned that their peers held differing views on matters of race and multiraciality. For example, Alexandra's friends at Ignacio came mainly from her social science classes, but she also heard comments from classmates that surprised her. She said:

> I took Race Relations, which was interesting ... and I took Social Psych and Attitudes and Social Influence, things like that and I found it really interesting. Other people's answers to questions about race, in a predominantly white school, were interesting. I couldn't believe that they had never heard of some of these things. They would say how they came from this and they never heard of that. I was like, wow! It's strange how people here have really different experiences.

In all of these cases, peer culture and values about race relations, raciality, and culture were transmitted through everyday experiences in the microsystems of academic life.

Friendship groups

The microsystems of friendship groups formed the core of most students' residential and social life. Participants talked about the importance of their friends in developing and maintaining identity. Friendship groups existed within the larger context of peer culture and were generally selected based on mutual interests (activities, academics, music performance, etc.), similar background (heritage, home region, etc.), or compatible lifestyles (early-rising roommates, athletes who ate together after practice, all-night studiers or partiers, etc.).

Identity sometimes also played a role in the creation of friendship groups. At Carberry, several students who had attended the pre-orientation program for students of color maintained friendships with people they had met there. Jeff recalled a bus ride to a skating party where he met a biracial classmate; three years later, the two were still good friends. Dan, Kira, and Kayla talked about friends they made at the pre-orientation program, several of whom were still important in their lives. At all three campuses, students made friends in identity-based student organizations and in coalitions of students of color.

As an upperclass student, Summer was seeking a group of students in which she could be more comfortable than she was with the all-white group of friends she had had since her first year. After a party sophomore year at Ignacio during which she realized that she was the only person of

color in the room, Summer decided to associate with a new group of students when she returned from studying in Japan. She left the friendship group with which she had lived for two years to move into an on-campus apartment with a more diverse group of women. Of the two groups, she said:

> At the very end of sophomore year, that's when I started to have my first half-asian friends here. I had met [X] and this other guy [Y] who's half-Filipino and half-Spanish, and this girl [Z] who's half-Filipino, half-white, amongst other people. This group of friends had a very different vibe.
>
> I don't know, I just felt they were much more laid back and more educated, more liberal, whereas these others, some of these big, I hate to say it, big white jock-y guys would say, "You're taking Japanese? What does it sound like?" and then just make these really stupid noises, and I couldn't believe that my roommates wanted to hang out with people like that. They were so, so ignorant.
>
> So I really bonded with this other group. ... And they're cool and I like them and I've learned a lot by living with them, and I'm so thankful for this group of friends because they are more laid back and they're just more interesting. And we have our little half-asian jokes. It's cool for me, so I'm definitely grateful for that.

Friends were not only a major piece of peer culture, they were also a means to increase exposure to other aspects of it. Jeff joined a fraternity because he had had a friend in it. BJ met students from other parts of campus through friends from the track team. Daniele and Erika sang in the same choral group and had expanded their networks on campus through those friendships. Jazz connected with the broader international community at Woolley through her Middle Eastern friends.

Social life and dating

Friends served as the core of social life for most participants, and friendship groups were the foundation of socializing, but there were sometimes other microsystems incorporating students' social lives as well. Students' identities impacted how they chose to socialize and vice versa. At Ignacio, where the general milieu supported a lively party atmosphere on weekends, students who chose not to partake of these activities were on the margins. At Woolley, whose active party scene participants attributed to its relatively isolated location, there was an awareness and support of some students' choice not to drink and non-drinkers felt like they were part of the general campus climate, though some participants avoided the parties altogether. At Carberry, only one participant discussed the general social life on campus, and he talked about his fraternity's easy acceptance of his decision not to drink. Social behavior, and specifically drinking alcohol, marked students as

insiders or outsiders at Ignacio far more so than at Woolley or Carberry. There, it was a way of identifying with mainstream campus culture, no matter what a student's background.

Another aspect of social life that students talked about was the issue of dating. For many participants dating was not an issue, either because they were not in a dating relationship at the time of the research or because they were involved in long-distance relationships that they felt did not influence their lives on a constant basis. At Carberry, the subject of interracial dating had been contentiously debated on campus in the three years prior to the study, and participants detailed the history of the debate. I will discuss the general disagreement regarding interracial dating in the upcoming section on peer culture, but because the individual dating behaviors of a few participants were also important in shaping their identities, I will discuss those relationships in this section on the microsystems of social life.

While in Japan as a junior, Summer met a biracial Japanese and white student from another university. They visited his relatives in Japan and she said, "[they] felt this connection with me immediately, just from the asian thing. ... it was really interesting for me to see how [monoracial Japanese] people perceived me." The dating relationship created opportunities to try to see herself as others did.

Kayla's dating experience, however, was not so positive, and it prompted her to question how she viewed her identity and what that meant about the people whom she would date in the future. When she arrived on campus for pre-orientation and met a strong community of people of color, she began to develop her identity as a multiracial person, and her relationship with the monoracial white man with whom she had been involved changed:

> My ex-boyfriend was totally fine with who I was until he started to realize that I felt differently about who I was than he did. He was like, "I never thought of you as racially different from me," but I believe that I am. He was fine with Kayla his girlfriend, but Kayla the multiracial individual who was also his girlfriend was a big problem.
>
> Then, things just kept coming up, and his parents didn't like me and he said, "Well, I think it's because you're not white enough for them." And I said, "Why do you think that? Are you just saying that? Do you have some reason to think that?" And he said, "Well, I don't see what else it would be, because, like, they want me to be with like a tall, blonde, white girl." I'm just like, "OK." (laugh)
>
> Then I wrote to him after [the pre-orientation for students of color] to try to clue him into my whole mindset, because I didn't feel like it would be right not to tell him about the things that were going on since there big changes and everything. And he wrote me back like, "Who are you?" And I was just like, "Oh my gosh! (laugh) I can't believe I'm trying to share my inner thoughts with you and you're

> treating me like this!" (laugh) We had a lot of problems. ... So definitely there's issues of identity going on. (laugh)

Involvement in activities

The microsystems of campus activities formed other sites of identity development, friendship group formation, and exposure to peer culture. Participants were involved in sports, cultural groups, student government, fraternity life, peer counseling, performing arts, communications media, and academic enrichment. Several had jobs on campus. Specific to their racial identity, students participated in monoracial groups of color, general activities of the communities of students of color, and the multiracial students group (Spectrum) at Carberry. Students had a variety of motives for joining different activities and attributed a number of outcomes to participation.

Half of the participants were actively involved in organizations on campus for monoracial students of color or attended meetings or events held by these groups. Vincent was an officer in the Chinese Student Association at Ignacio, and BJ went to Black Student Forum meetings as well as Filipino Society events. At Woolley, Sapo belonged to the Latino Students Association, Dave and Jazz went to Middle Eastern Association activities, and Marisa was part of the group for black students. Carberry students were least likely to belong to a monoracial student group, but Dee Dee enjoyed activities in the black community, Kayla went to South Asian Student Association activities, and David occasionally joined in Japan Club events. Students cited expanding cultural knowledge, being in a group of like-others, as well as having fun as reasons for joining these groups.

Other students felt like they could not join these groups because they lacked enough cultural knowledge. Alexandra said:

> I guess I am not that type that would feel comfortable in a place like AHANA[5] where I would feel like an outsider because I don't speak the language. I know a little bit about the customs but not enough to be really part of the group.

Dan felt like he didn't completely fit in with Chinese-American students at Carberry, and Elektra didn't feel comfortable in the group at Ignacio. So the very groups that some students sought as sources of cultural knowledge were the ones from which others felt excluded because they felt they did not have enough cultural knowledge to participate. At Woolley there was less discomfort in the monoracial groups, a phenomenon that participants attributed to the size of the community of color;

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[5] "AHANA" was the acronym for african-american, hisapnic, asian, and native american students at Ignacio. Students who identified with the social, political, and cultural networks of students of color were known as AHANA students, and students used the acronym as shorthand to refer to the campus center for students of color.

organizations wanted and needed all the members they could get and were quite open to accepting people who were culturally knowledgeable to varying extents.

Seven of the eight students at Carberry had been involved at some point with Spectrum, though neither Ignacio or Woolley had a group for multiracial students at the time of the research. Clubs on campus for Hawai'ian students created a similar atmosphere where asian-white ethnic mixes were the norm. David enjoyed the group at Carberry, and Erika belonged to the Hawai'ian Club at Woolley because, she said, "I feel like I belong there the most, because you know, they're half-Japanese- like half-Hawai'ian and half-American- and I like that better [than monoracial asian student groups]."

Unlike the motivation of seeking cultural knowledge for joining monoracial groups, the reasons to join Spectrum or a Hawai'ian club focused on the experience of being bi- or multiracial. Students spoke repeatedly of "finding a space" on campus where they felt that they fit in, where their legitimacy was not being challenged. Marisa, who did not have the option of joining a multiracial group at Woolley said, "I wish there were a multiracial group on campus. I think I would probably feel I fit in more there than anything else." Of Spectrum at Carberry, Jeff said that in his first year it "became my vent in a way...and it was just a good place to talk about things." Kira felt like she did not need the group after her first year, but was glad it remained a resource on campus.

Julia was the coordinator of Spectrum when she was interviewed for this study and she described how the organization had contributed to her identity development.

> And this year I'm co-chair of Spectrum- I just went and they needed a co-chair. But I really feel like now my identity is so out there, because I'm co-chair and everybody's, and most of the other people in the Third World[6] groups, like all of those people know me, and I programmed Multiracial Heritage Week and doing all the stuff for that. I was thinking about it much more now, just because I'm doing things with it.

On each of the campuses, decisions about which groups to join and which activities to attend had implications not only for how students saw themselves, but for how others viewed them. At Ignacio, several students decided not to participate in AHANA activities because they were concerned with how AHANA students were viewed on campus:

> I noticed that in the other groups, with AHANA, and I don't know what they would say about this, but in my opinion, from what I see and hear, I feel like they

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[6]For over twenty years, the politically active students of color at Carberry had used the term "Third World" to refer to themselves and to indicate solidarity with people of color from developing and colonized nations. The administration continued to use this term, though discussions were underway to consider a change.

> segregate themselves, and that is nothing I wanted to be a part of. And so not that I've avoided those groups, but just that I've never felt comfortable with them. Not necessarily because I am only half Asian, but I don't know; I don't like the message I got from them, it wasn't an appealing one. (Jennifer)

Vincent and Phil were less concerned about this image and felt comfortable moving back and forth between AHANA activities and the general campus milieu.

At Carberry, participation in certain activities in the Third World community served to legitimize one's identity as truly belonging. Beginning with the pre-orientation session, which was the introduction to the Third World community, participants felt like their peers were judging just how "Third World" they really were. Attending the pre-orientation marked a students as an insider. Another activity that could increase a biracial student's legitimacy in the eyes of his or her peers was counseling in the minority peer counseling program, a residential program in which returning students were selected to live with and guide first-year students. Planning events for or being selected to speak during Multiracial Heritage Week were other means to prove one's legitimacy in the Third World community.

Participants noted several outcomes of involvement in campus activities. They generally enjoyed their involvement in the general milieu, making friends, gaining skills, and having fun with sports, music, debate, event planning, etc. In the activities for students of color, however, they reported a range of outcomes, both negative and positive.

The main negative result was that students sometimes felt rejected by monoracial student groups and felt as though they did not belong to the community of color. Their legitimacy was challenged by others and they questioned it themselves. Kira wrote that if she had not become involved with the Filipino Alliance, "I would not have felt this pressure to prove my Filipino-ness, nor that, had I not 'clicked' with them, I would have begun to doubt my Filipino-ness." Marisa told of an incident that occurred when the Black Students Association at Woolley was re-writing the group's constitution and the question of allowing students of other ethnicities to be members arose. One man "was going around the room and he's looking at different people, 'I don't mind if she stays and she stays,' singling me out that I'm not black, that I'm not one of them." Of the asian student groups at Carberry, Dan said, "Culture's such a big part ... and it's just hard to feel that you should be part or be involved without it. You feel like they treat you with this little bit of contempt for you because you don't know." Other participants described times when they felt similarly isolated from monoracial groups.

Students said the positive results of participation in activities were developing self-advocacy skills, gaining an awareness of identity politics, making cross-cultural friendships, and finding a community of mixed race students. At Carberry, Spectrum was repeatedly cited as a place where students felt like they fit in.

> Actually, when I went to a women of color meeting [at the Women's Center] it was identity politics to the degree that there was like no coalition at all, and I felt really rejected and I immediately went straight to Spectrum and had a good session there and it just felt good to have people who were undergoing the same frustrations I was.

A major function of involvement in activities was to broaden students' exposure to peer culture. In friendship groups they could choose to be around people whom they liked and with whom they generally agreed; in the ideological marketplace of peer culture, however, they encountered a range of attitudes and prejudices. Sorting through those messages and fitting the pieces together with their own experiences was a means for many participants to think about their own identity. Often they attributed specific aspects of identity development to involvement in activities. In his role as a residential peer counselor with first-year students, Dan participated in an Orientation Week race relations activity with his floor. His involvement in the workshop led him to reflect on race:

> We did an exercise dealing with race relations and it was the first time a lot of people had gone through something like that so it was a very uncomfortable experience for a lot of people, but it definitely helped me formulate, like I actually went back to my room and wrote this thing, I don't really know what it was, like I just started thinking and wrote a couple pages about just, issues of race and institutionalized racism and so I just kind of went on this tirade for like an hour or two, so I definitely wrote some things, like this vision of me writing this question on "Dan's Thoughts On Race" (laugh).

Other students encountered peer culture through participation in sports teams, student clubs, and campus events.

The Mesosystem of Peer Culture

Bronfenbrenner (1993) defined a mesosystem as comprising "the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings containing the developing person" and focusing "on the synergistic effects created by the interaction of developmentally instigative or inhibitory features and processes present in each setting" (p. 22). For participants, mesosystems formed where microsystems of academic work, friendship groups, student activities, and social/dating life interacted. I have also called these interactions the creation of peer culture, through which participants shaped their beliefs about the possibilities for belonging to identity-based space on campus.

At Ignacio, it became clear that identifying as AHANA meant not being part of mainstream culture. At Woolley, peer culture supported the exploration of identity in community. At Carberry,

identification with the Third World community in general involved some legitimizing behavior, but monoracial student groups were even more stringent in admitting biracial students. On all three campuses, friendship groups and campus activities were the main settings in which the mesosystem of peer culture was made visible.

There were several variables in the peer culture mesosystem. Was the situation predominantly white, racially diverse or predominantly students of color? If it was mainly or totally students of color, were they from different backgrounds? Was it a group of monoracial students of one race or ethnicity? Depending on the situation, students got the message that they fit in or did not, that their experience and contributions were valued or considered questionable and expendable. These messages formed the basis for developmentally instigative or inhibitory environments. Whether it was through an article in the Carberry campus paper saying that biracial people were undermining the black community when they established themselves as a separate group or, conversely, through Woolley's Black Student Association aggressively recruiting a particular multiracial student to join activities, peer culture was a powerful medium to transmit messages of exclusion or inclusion.

Interracial dating was a major issue within the community of color at Carberry, though it was not so controversial at Woolley or Ignacio. Of the situation at Ignacio, Jennifer said:

> I've been going out with my boyfriend for about three years, and he's a hundred percent Irish. Nobody's got a problem with that! I mean, I have a lot of friends who are asian and black, and everybody just kind of dates who they like. I've never-- I don't think-- not that I can ever remember, anyone discriminating against someone due to their color.

Participants at Carberry spoke of significant incidents from the previous two years where monoracial students of color had spoken out or written articles opposing interracial dating. This aspect of peer culture was particularly painful to some students both because they felt like their families were being attacked and because they worried about how they could pursue dating relationships that were not somehow interracial. Kayla attended a heated forum on interracial dating and left frustrated:

> I'm not going to criticize [people who don't want to date outside their race] for feeling this way, but it makes me wonder if I'm ever going to be able to get married. Because everyone seemed to really want to preserve their culture. And they felt like an intermarriage would be totally going against that. You know, also, someone was saying that being a Hindu Indian is so much part of who they were they couldn't even imagine being with someone who wasn't. And I'm trying to run through this, like, how do they define this? What is their definition of being a Hindu Indian, because I think I am, but do they think I am? And what's going to

> happen, you know, when- if I am interested in marrying a person of color who is interested in preserving their heritage, what's that going to mean? I don't know. So it's just kind of weird. I was (laugh), I was joking around saying, "Am I going to have to marry someone white just by default?" (laugh)

They received other messages about the expressed or tacit values of their peers as well. They sometimes learned that among their classmates of color, assimilation into the general campus milieu was considered "selling out." Jeff and his girlfriend, who was black, decided the same year to join a fraternity and a sorority, respectively. This act was viewed as assimilation into the antithesis of progressive student politics at Carberry. However, Jeff felt like his decision was not received as poorly in the Third World community as his girlfriend's was, because "it's not necessarily an expectation that I'm white, but some of that tension is there." In other words, his peers of color did not expect as much allegiance from him as a biracial man as they did from a monoracial black woman. Negotiating the interface of the fraternity and Third World community microsystems, Jeff encountered a number of challenges to his developing sense of himself as a biracial person.

Challenges also arose as students learned from peer culture that identification with AHANA students at Ignacio marked them as outsiders in the mainstream of campus life. In her first year, Summer felt like, "It was either I joined AHANA and had all asian friends or I hung out with everyone else. So it was like two really separate paths I could have taken, and very rarely can you do both." At Woolley, where students of color were part of the mainstream culture, multiracial students worked alongside their monoracial peers of color to inject the predominantly white campus culture with artistic, musical, and literary events of different ethnic groups. They joined the Intercultural Board and attended events sponsored by other groups as well as their own. Participants said that the pressure to identify primarily with monoracial groups of color that existed in the Third World community at Carberry was not a feature of life at Woolley.

These examples demonstrate the importance of the overall climate for students of color and the atmosphere of race relations on each campus in determining the experience of bi- and multiracial students. Participants spoke of college life as far more racialized than high school. For some students, life in this highly racialized community pushed them to consider their identity in different ways. Vincent said that "up until now, I never really thought about my multiple heritage background and how it's integrated into Ignacio or how it should be integrated into Ignacio," but "recently, I've started [thinking about it] just because of my friends. And it's interesting." For others, constant discussion of racial issues on campus was unwelcome and distracting. Jazz said:

> I don't see why it's so important to everyone here. I went to a very diverse high school in Cairo and we all got along fine. I just wish people would stop asking me <u>what</u> I am and start paying attention to <u>who</u> I am.

In some situations, students enjoyed their status as multiracial people who did not fit neatly into conventional dialogue about race, and campus peer culture became a foil against which they could define their own identity. Alexandra enjoyed not fitting into existing categories and Erika felt like her biracial heritage, in addition to her Japanese upbringing, made her unique and special, as well as allowed her to think about herself outside the constrictions of race as defined in the United States. Subscribing to Weisman's (1996) theory of "positive alterity" these students found a way to move beyond the everyday discussion of race and race relations on campus to form their own identities.

Just as each students' overall ecology was unique, their mesosystems of peer culture impacted them in a different of ways, instigating or inhibiting identity development. There were themes that emerged at each campus: issues of legitimacy were prevalent at Carberry; the separation of AHANA students from mainstream culture was a theme at Ignacio; and the fluidity of student groupings was frequently mentioned among Woolley participants. But on-campus microsystems and mesosystems were not the only influence on students' lives. Their ecologies were also impacted by features and processes happening in systems outside school, in which they did not operate but which influenced them nevertheless. As I will describe in the next section, these factors in the exosystem played a significant role in how students experienced peer culture and identity development.

Exosystems: family, hometown, high school

According to Bronfenbrenner (1993), exosystems involve "linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings, at least one of which does not contain the developing person, but in which events occur that indirectly influence processes within the immediate setting in which the developing person lives" (p. 24). For students attending residential colleges, exosystems entail family, home, and home communities, as well as settings such as university administration or government agencies that influence (through programs or policy) life on campus. Other external settings may include religious communities away from campus or international school or travel programs. Like mesosystems, these exosystems contain processes and features that can instigate or inhibit identity development.

I depart from Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1993) ecology model in this section to include aspects of a student's life that occurred prior to college. Whereas Bronfenbrenner's model captures one period of an individual's life (though it can be applied at any point over the lifespan), I want to represent the dual reality of a traditional-age college student's life as s/he moves from college to home for extended periods of time over four (or more) years. The exosystem and the mesosystem are not as distinct for a college student as they are for a child who lives at home and attends grade school during the day. Home and family give way to, but are not fully replaced by, residence halls

and peer culture as the primary setting of a college student's development. I attempt to capture this reality by including family and background in discussion of the exosystem.

Of the exosystem factors, the one that had the greatest impact on issues of identity was the student's family. The family was the source of the individual's heritage and was generally the primary site of cultural transmission. Parents were usually the people who determined where a child grew up and what schools s/he attended, both of which featured in identity development. The family operated as a microsystem prior to college, but then as part of the exosystem once the student left home. I am treating both the historical and current elements of family and home life as exosystem factors; though students were not directly in the home or family setting, these settings influenced microsystem factors in the students' campus lives to instigate or inhibit development.

In some cases, the way parents chose to discuss issues of race and racism with the students affected how participants viewed multiracial identity. A few mentioned specific efforts parents made to ensure that their biracial children could identify proudly as such. David's parents, whom he described as "ex-hippies" were "kind of proud of their biracial child." Julia remembered:

> when I was little, my parents were so worried about me, cause I have two sisters, and they were so worried about us fitting in and as far back as I can remember they were always telling us, "Hey, it's OK that you're biracial. You're friends might think it's weird or stuff like that, but it's really OK, because we love you."

Other parents emphasized the importance of one culture in the household and limited participants' access to cultural knowledge of the un-emphasized heritage. Often in these situations, one or both parents were immigrants to the United States and they wanted their children to be as "American" as possible, where American was interpreted as "white." Elektra's Chinese mother didn't teach her children to speak Chinese because "she always thought we'd be more American if we didn't speak another language. ... She always wanted us to be more Americanized. More white. She didn't want us to feel too asian." Sina's white father wanted his daughters to grow up "American" and did not want her mother to teach the girls her native language, Samoan.

In addition to parents, siblings and extended family played a role in the exosystem and in identity development. For some students, siblings were a ready-made community of similar others. Alexandra was the third of nine children in her family, and she acknowledged that having such a large contingent of other latino-asian-native american peers reduced the possibility of feeling isolated as a multiracial person. Siblings were often mentioned as protectors, trailblazers, or friends, but there was a pattern of differing interpretations and experiences of racial identity. For example, Luisa said that her sister and brother would describe their experiences of biraciality differently from how she describes hers; her sister's "more Filipino looks" have made her life journey different from Luisa's. Jeff's brother went to the University of California system and

joined an asian fraternity, whereas Jeff spent sophomore year as a minority peer counselor at Carberry and then joined a predominantly white fraternity.

Other exosystem factors that impacted students' experience were where they grew up and went to school. The context in which participants formed their ideas about culture and race varied, but the general feeling was that race and racial identity was a more prominent feature in college life than before it. Whether students grew up in Cairo, Egypt or a rural community in Maryland, their childhood surroundings influenced how they viewed themselves once they came to college and what microsystems they sought out or developed.

Six students lived outside the United States for many or all of their pre-college years. For these students, racial categories in the United States were not a common feature of their childhood or part of the formation of their identity before college. Vincent, Jazz, and Erika considered themselves more as international students than as racial minorities in the United States. Jazz said, "Still, I think I am more Egyptian than I am anything here [in the United States]. Sometimes I have to mark it down, and then I think of what I am supposed to write." These students formed friendship groups with other internationals and expressed discomfort with some common behaviors and attitudes of typical American college students. Vincent, who took advantage of the urban location of his college to network with international students from other schools, said:

> When I consider myself, my white part is really mostly a European part. And I don't mind. Actually, my first year, the first week that I was here, I started going out with these guys on my floor. But their idea of fun is not my idea of fun. What I think is funny, they don't think is funny. So it's not that we don't like each other or we despise each other, it's just that we can't get along in a nice way, basically. We just have different ideas. And however I can associate myself more with asians, I guess that's my idea of who I want for my friends.

Ten of the other participants lived in or very near major urban areas with ethnically diverse populations, and half of these students were from California or Washington state, areas where the population of multiracial asian americans is generally believed to be the highest in the country (Schmidt, 1997). Many in this group of students who grew up with easy access to a diverse community remarked that before college race was not as much of an issue. According to Kira, "Here at [Carberry], there's a lot of awareness about issues of race in some sense, and I've found it's a lot more political. In high school, people just sort of lived out being of a certain race rather than actually discussing it." When race was talked about in high school, it was frequently in the form of in-group humor and friendly teasing, as when Elektra's high school friends, playing on the stereotype of asians as the "model minority," told her that she would have been a better student if she "didn't have that white half bringing [her] down."

The remaining eight students grew up in predominantly white communities and attended predominantly white schools. Several of these students remarked that coming to college and joining an established community of color prompted them to explore their racial identity. Coming from a predominantly white high school, Kayla arrived at Carberry for the pre-orientation for students of color:

> The first big catalyst to my self growth was probably [pre-orientation]. That's the first time I had officially been part of any sort of institution that was geared towards people of color. And it was the first time I identified as biracial, the first time I was surrounded by a group of biracial and multiracial individuals.

Woolley students who had attended predominantly white schools acknowledged that their college was not as diverse as they would have liked, but they chose the school for other reasons (academics, size, financial aid, sense of overall community, etc.) and had been willing to make the compromise.

The exosystems in students' ecologies, together with the historical family and home elements I am treating as external to the college experience, functioned as the mesosystems did to shape the developmental possibilities students sought out or had available to them. In families with low levels of cultural transmission from older to younger generations, racial identity development may have been inhibited. For students who grew up living outside the United States, opportunities for cultural identity development may have been enhanced. These exosystem factors worked with the mesosystem to create an overall scheme of developmental inhibitors or enhancers, the macrosystem.

Macrosystem Influence on Students' Ideas About Race and Culture

A macrosystem, according to Bronfenbrenner (1993) is the "overarching pattern of micro-, meso-, and exosystems characteristic of a given culture, subculture, or other extended social structure" and refers particularly to the "developmentally instigative belief systems, resources, hazards, lifestyles, opportunity structures, life course options and patterns of social interchange that are embedded in such overarching systems" (p. 25). Because I was concerned primarily with multiracial students' experience in college, I focused on factors in the macrosystem that instigated or inhibited identity development during their college years.

One major theme that emerged from the data in this regard involved the factors that influenced the development of ideas about race and culture. Students ideas about race and culture, culled from peer culture, academics, family, and home life, affected how they viewed themselves, and more important, the possibilities they saw for racial identity in college. Their view of these possibilities led them to seek out further opportunities to explore identity issues or caused them to foreclose (Marcia, 1980) in a particular identity. Furthermore, the specific microsystems available in the three institutions influenced what identities and identity-based communities students saw as

potential or preferable options. In this section, I will discuss how students' macrosystem ideas about race, culture, and possible identities were influenced by the micro-, meso-, and exosystems of family life and peer culture.

Students' ideas about race and culture interacted closely with their identities. At times their notions of race and culture confirmed their identity and at other times their developing sense of themselves informed their thinking about race and culture. In the pilot study (Renn, 1997) the differences between race and culture were not a prevalent theme, but in the current study most students raised the issue directly or indirectly. Participants understood culture as the accumulation of values, traditions, language, religion, food, dress, and art of a self-identified national or ethnic group. Race was understood as a feature of life in the United States, a categorical definition imposed by the government and reinforced through stereotypes attributed to people of similar phenotypes.

An important aspect of identity development and formulation of ideas about culture and race in college was the degree to which students had experienced the culture of both or all of their heritages. Students who believed that they did not have sufficient cultural knowledge were more likely than others to say that they had difficulty associating with their monoracial peers of color on campus. While they sometimes encountered overt challenges to their legitimacy as Koreans, South Asians, latinas, or blacks, they spoke just as often of questioning their own legitimacy in those communities on campus. A faculty member suggested Elektra join the Chinese Students Association to practice her language skills:

> And I was like "Oh yeah, that's a great idea," and at the same time I'm thinking, "Would I be accepted?" And so I never really did that, but I don't know. I guess I always felt that I wouldn't, and I still do in a lot of ways.

The students who felt most comfortable identifying with monoracial groups were those who had the greatest degree of cultural transmission from family and others at home. For example, while growing up BJ learned a great deal about Filipino culture and enjoyed the Filipino Society at Ignacio, and Sapo brought his knowledge of Mexican culture to the Latino Student Association at Woolley. This interaction between family background and peer culture formed a key element in the macrosystem of students' ecologies.

While issues of culture and cultural transmission affected how students viewed themselves, issues of race were seen more as externally-defined categories at college. Students in general said that race was discussed much more often in college than it was in high school, and that it mattered more in college than before. From the check boxes on the application to mailings targeted to certain groups, college was a place where race was viewed as important, an observation reinforced by student organizations and administrative programs for students of color. While race was highly salient on each campus, only four participants said that they had experienced or witnessed overt

incidents of racism, none of which were directed at them personally. Some students talked about their experience of the effects of institutionalized and societal racism, such as when David described his decision to study in Japan as a way both to explore his ethnic identity and "also to kind of escape the racism - the daily psychological drain" of being a person of color on a predominantly white campus and in the United States in general.

At Carberry and Ignacio, students said that before college they made friends, some of whom were of the same background, but in college they felt they were expected to associate with people based on similar backgrounds whether or not they otherwise would have chosen them as friends. Kira wrote about the difference between home and college:

> At home, Filipino-ness wasn't what initiated the friendships. I got to know these Filipinos because we happened to get along well or because there was some attraction. The fact that we were able to relate so well to each other or that this attraction existed probably had a great deal to do with us both being Filipino, but our racial identity was a passive factor in the formation of our relationship. In my interactions with Filipinos at Carberry, racial identity is an active factor. ... Had I met the members of [the Filipino Alliance] elsewhere on campus, I don't know if I would have become friends with them.

Ignacio students and other Carberry students echoed this sentiment and attributed this phenomenon to highly racialized campus climates, a major contributor to the macrosystem environment.

While participants at all schools were clear about the differences between culture and race, Carberry students, like the participants in the pilot study (Renn, 1997), were facile with postmodern language and theory and deconstructed the concept of race. For example, Jeff was "taking that anthropology course about deconstructing racial discourse and deconstructing interracial relationships." Dee Dee knew that "it's already been established that the human race exists but not in racial categories based on physical characteristics." And Kayla explained how she understood multiraciality:

> I was saying that if you accept race as a social construction, that gives us even more legitimacy in the freedom to choose what you want to identify as, because there's no, like, biological thing tying you to one or the other background.

Their peers at Ignacio and Woolley were not so theoretical in their understanding of race, but they, too, explained the ways that race is used in the United States to categorize people and create institutional statistics. Several students noted–either cynically or matter-of-factly–that no matter what they marked on forms, they knew that the school would count them in whatever category was most advantageous to the institution.

In all cases, the ideas students had about culture and race influenced their identity, and their identity in turn informed their ideas about culture and race. Alexandra felt that race was not at all

important and she therefore didn't claim a racial identity unless compelled, in which case she would defy instructions to "check one box only" and check asian, hispanic and native american: "It's not that important to me so I don't want people to think it is important to know. So, by saying all three or not specifying exactly who I am they're not sure."

Dee Dee wished that categories would be defined by culture rather than by race, but she identified as black because she believed that black, as constructed in the United States, already encompassed other heritages as well. With their international backgrounds and perspectives on race, Vincent, Marisa, Jazz, Erika and Audrey identified more as international students than as any particular American racial category. When asked how she described herself in terms of her identity, Marisa said:

> I just identify myself as being Jamaican, and then people say, "But you are black. What are you?" I just say Jamaican. I am what I am. I don't get into the-- of course, applications say check the little black box, but I don't really identify myself as anything. I hate being called African-American. I'm not American.

In a sense, every time Marisa or another student filled out an institutional form asking for race, she was confronted with a developmental moment. Whether that moment instigated or inhibited identity development depended on a personal history of micro-, meso-, and exosystem interactions that formed the macrosystem of that student's ecology.

Effects of ecology on students' identity choices

Whether or not students felt their racial identity (as defined in the United States) was a central aspect of their lives, and whether or not they were adept at postmodern deconstruction of racial categories, they lived on college campuses where race was an important element of the macrosystem. At the time of the research, students' macrosystems were campus-based, although I also included elements of family and home life that were not temporally situated in their present macrosystems. The combined microsystems of academic work, friendships groups, social/dating life, and activities formed a lively peer culture that in turn interacted with family, home, and other exosystems to create the dynamic macrosystems of participants' ecologies.

Because participants shared peer culture across their campus cohorts, their macrosystem ecologies contained shared elements within each group. Because the cohorts shared common elements across the field of private, selective higher education on predominantly white campuses, the macrosystem ecologies of the whole group also shared features. Furthermore, all participants were living as mixed race people in a country firmly wedded to the ideology of "pure" racial categories, a common experience that characterized all of their personal ecologies.

Micro-, meso-, and exosystems combined to create some unique and some shared patterns within the macrosystems of participants' lives, and a key element of my analysis is how students' ideas about race and culture are formed within this dynamic mix. The systems of students' lives

not only created the actual options available to students in terms of identity on campus, but peer culture in particular influenced which of these options students saw as preferable. Students' identities influenced their choices of microsystems (classes they would take, clubs they would join, friendships they would pursue, etc.), and their choices of microsystems in turn influenced the developmental instigators and inhibitors to which they would be exposed.

The experience of belonging or not belonging to identity-based spaces on campus influenced students' identity choices. Some students identified with one monoracial group of color, others moved between monoracial identities, a few claimed solely multiracial identities, and one third of the participants sometimes opted out of racial categorization altogether by denying the validity of race as a meaningful social category. The three main conditions that influenced how students selected identity-based space to occupy were the size and location of the community of color on campus and the impact of peer culture on the permeability of group boundaries (a detailed discussion of these factors is contained in Renn, 1998a and 1998b). While students' individual ecologies influenced their individual identity choices, these common elements of campus life emerged as key factors in determining what choices were available and how desirable they were to students.

Implications for Higher Education

The results of this study hold implications for college student development theory, student affairs administration, undergraduate and graduate curricula, and the use of racial categories in higher education. First, this study provides evidence of the usefulness of applying Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1993) ecology model to racial identity development in college. Given the importance of peer culture in determining how students choose to identify themselves, the ecology model begins to explain how interactions among and between various microsystems form a mesosystem of peer culture. The model also explains how the mesosystem interacts with exosystem factors to form a macrosystem that holds developmental possibilities for students. It is possible that other elements of student development theory such as moral, cognitive, and identity development could be unified in an ecology model as well.

The findings speak to the need to create and maintain spaces where students can explore their heritages and experiences as racialized people, but they also speak to the need for increased cross-racial dialogue on the issues of race, ethnicity, and identity. Several participants noted that students of color did not discuss racial issues with white students; multiracial students were caught in between, unable to discuss issues with white students or with monoracial students of color, who generally denied the authenticity of the biracial students' experience. Campus leaders can continue to provide programs and services for various identity-based groups while aggressively promoting cross-racial dialogue about race and race relations on campus. This study points to residential

living arrangements as one specific arena in which cross-cultural relationships are fostered, and the literature on residential life may be useful in developing programs and policy toward this end.

In addition to emphasizing the importance of identity-based spaces on campus, the results of this study raise the issue of college curricula in students' identity development. One of the main differences between the Carberry cohort and those at Ignacio and Woolley was the way in which Carberry students used postmodern theory to explain aspects of race and racial identity. The Carberry cohort had many more opportunities than the others to discuss the construction of themselves as racialized beings. The Carberry cohort, like the students in the pilot study (Renn, 1997), both described an academic atmosphere replete with the jargon of postmodernism and utilized deconstructionist language during the interviews and focus groups. Access to the theory and language of postmodernism, as well as peer support for engaging in deconstruction of social categories, gave Carberry students easier access to ways of thinking about themselves and their identities than was available to Ignacio and Woolley students. Students on all campuses benefitted from opportunities to write and talk about their racial heritages, and academic exercises formed the basis for significant exploration of multiracial identity. Biracial identity theorists (Kich, 1992; Poston, 1990) describe the cognitive flexibility required to sustain a biracial identity, and college curricula addressing the social construction of racial categories could be a powerful means for students to acquire some of this flexibility.

This study also suggests some additions to graduate preparation curricula in higher education administration. In addition to traditional student development theories, graduate students need to understand how postmodern thinking has permeated the social sciences and offers new perspectives from which to consider the development of identity and community on campus. New professionals should be aware of the growing presence of multiracial students in higher education and of the ways in which services and programs designed for (monoracial) students of color may not meet the needs of biracial and multiracial individuals.

On a broader scale, the issue of biracial students on campus collides with current developments in affirmative action policy. How will we "count" biracial students? Will we consider them as monoracial blacks, asians, latinos? What if they refuse to "check one box only"? Will we decide for them? Participants frequently expressed skepticism about the administrative manipulation of demographic data used to categorize multiracial people. Students who sometimes chose to "opt out" of identifying along U.S. racial lines pointed out the arbitrary nature of racial categorization and the therefore arbitrary nature of racial quotas in college admissions policy; they also acknowledged the non-arbitrary nature of racism in the educational system. Caught between their postmodern view of racial construction and their experience as people of color in a racist society, they were unable to theorize away or ignore challenges to affirmative action policy. As one student said, "I know that race isn't real, but racism is." In any case, as higher education leaders

continue to struggle with issues of access, equity, and affirmative action, they will have to deal with more and more students who do not fit neatly into pre-determined racial categories. Studies such as this one provide important information for institutional and system-wide decision makers.

Limitations of this study

The two major limitations of this study are the nature of the sample and the impact of my own identity. Sampling bias is likely to occur when participants self-select for a study, as they did for this one. Students of multiracial heritage who did not identity as such were unlikely to volunteer to participate, and some may not have know about the project. I invited one biracial student (Dee Dee) whom I knew identified as monoracial, but did not have access to others.

Another limiting aspect of the sample population was that the three sites were, by design, similar in nature (predominantly white, residential, undergraduate emphasis, selective, etc.). Perhaps the most distinguishing characteristic of the group is their membership among the nation's more (or most) prestigious private institutions. Most college students in the United States do not attend schools like these. Embedded in this limiting aspect is the issue of socioeconomic class and access to higher education. Although I analyzed class as a factor of identity development, the implications of class background on the study of multiracial college students are not known. The results of this study may not generalize well beyond the peer institutions of Carberry, Ignacio, and Woolley, and though generalizability is not usually an explicit goal of qualitative research, it will be important to know how useful the results of this study might be across institutional types.

My own racial identity–as a monoracial white woman–also limits the study. A few students asked about my racial identity, others asked why I was interested in the topic. My physical appearance suggests (correctly) that I am monoracial and white. Whether students knew by asking or surmised by looking, my whiteness may have affected the way they answered questions in the interview, wrote their responses, or talked with one another in focus groups. Though I could not change the impact of my identity on the data collected, I did attempt to learn how my identity affected my analysis and interpretation of results. In order to see how someone who was biracial might understand the data, I asked a biracial colleague familiar with qualitative research and with identity development theory to code two transcripts and a written response. I also asked a multiracial Carberry undergraduate who was not involved in the study to code two transcripts from interviews at other campuses. I learned that I was substantially in agreement with my coding consultants and adjusted my coding slightly. After I had coded and analyzed data, I presented preliminary results to study participants for their feedback in the focus groups. I found again that I was substantially in agreement with participant feedback. The coding consultations and member checks could not eliminate all bias on my part, but I believe that they helped correct for some of it.

Areas for future research

This study provides a window into the experience of multiracial students at three particular institutions. It builds on the multiracial identity development literature and fills a gap in college student development literature. It does not claim to represent the lives of all multiracial students, but it raises issues and questions that transcend institutional boundaries: How does the ecology of each student's experience influence multiracial identity development? How does the mesosystem of peer culture in particular mediate this development? Can the Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1993) ecology model be applied to other aspects of college student development? How will higher education address the growing numbers of multiracial people on campus through programs, services, and policies? There is still much to learn about the lives of multiracial students, about identity construction in college, and about the use of racial categories in higher education.

Toward that end, I suggest a broadening of the research sample to include students at public, two-year, rural, single-sex, and historically black, latina/o, or native american serving institutions. Because the history of racial dynamics varies by geographic region in the United States, exploration of multiracial construction at colleges outside the Northeast would be an important contribution. The on-campus construction of identities based on gender, class, and sexuality bear more exploration, especially when students' identities do not fit into pre-determined categories. How these students create and claim space is not well understood.

The student development literature would benefit from further research on how the mesosystem of peer culture influences students' individual identity choices. The field would also benefit from exploring if and how some overarching theory, such as Bronfenbrenner's ecology model, could unify existing theories and provide a framework for the introduction of postmodern, context-based identity development models.

Finally, this study indicates the need for further research in the area of institutional policy. Currently there are national statistics on multiracial college students, but there is strong evidence that the number of mixed race students is growing and will continue to do so. How do institutions treat multiracial individuals in the ever-important counting of racialized bodies on campus? How do affirmative action policies, racial quotas, and race-based scholarship programs treat multiracial students? Are services for (ostensibly) monoracial students of color equally available for multiracial students who have white heritage? As the number of multiracial college students grows, these questions will become increasingly important at all institutions, but especially at those, like the institutions of the California public higher education system, that are likely to enroll significant numbers of multiracial students. Advance research and consideration of these issues could prepare policy makers for the decisions they will soon face.

The results of this research point in a number of directions for future study in higher education, multiracial issues, and issues of race and multiraciality in higher education. From

analyzing individual campus climates to considering systemic use of racial data, the experiences of participants in this study speak to the need to think broadly about the construction of race in higher education and to challenge the notion of race as a rigid, immutable category. Continued research in the area of multiraciality and higher education will help us do both.

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